

Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 BOGOTA 10350 01 OF 02 072042Z
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AMCONSUL CALI POUCH
AMCONSUL MEDELLIN POUCH

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 BOGOTA 10350

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EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PFOR, CO
SUBJ: OUTLOOK FOR PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

1. SUMMARY. IN THE RACE BETWEEN THE TWO LEADING CONTENDERS FOR THE 1978 LIBERAL PARTY PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATION, JULIO CESAR TURBAY AND CARLOS LLERAS, LLERAS HAS DIMINISHED TURBAY'S EARLIER LARGE LEAD BUT STILL PROBABLY LAGS BEHIND. UNLESS SOME SIGNIFICANT EVENT CHANGES THE BALANCE, SUCH AS A MAJOR SCANDAL INVOLVING SOMEONE CLOSE TO TURBAY, HE WILL PROBABLY EDGE OUT LLERAS WHEN LIBERALS REGISTER THEIR PREFERENCE FOR THE PARTY'S NOMINEE DURING THE FEBRUARY CONGRESSIONAL ELECTION. THE STILL DIVIDED CONSERVATIVE PARTY HAS CHOSEN BELISARIO BETANCUR AS THEIR STANDARD BEARER. BETANCUR WOULD MAKE A STRONGER SHOWING AGAINST TURBAY THAN AGAINST LLERAS. HOWEVER, PARTY LOYALTY IS STRONG ENOUGH THAT THE MAJORITY LIBERAL PARTY WOULD PROBABLY PRODUCE ENOUGH VOTES TO ELECT TURBAY, SO THAT THE NEXT PRESIDENT OF COLOMBIA WILL PROBABLY BE ONE OF THE TWO LIBERALS. A PRELIMINARY EVALUATION OF THE EFFECT ON U.S. INTERESTS INDICATES THAT THEY WOULD BEST BE FAVORED BY LLERAS' ELECTION, SECOND BY

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PAGE 02 BOGOTA 10350 01 OF 02 072042Z

BETANCUR'S AND LEAST BY TURBAY'S. END SUMMARY.

2. THE LIBERALS. ALTHOUGH THE RACE FOR THE LIBERAL PARTY PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATION INCLUDES FOUR CANDIDATES, THE CONTEST IS REALLY BETWEEN CARLOS LLERAS AND JULIO CESAR TURBAY. THE CHANCES OF THE MINOR CONTENDERS, HERNANDO AGUDELO AND CARLOS HOLMES TRUJILLO, AS WELL AS FOR A PARTY SPLIT, VIRTUALLY DISAPPEARED WITH

THE MID-AUGUST AGREEMENT BY THE PRESIDENTIAL HOPEFULS TO SELECT THE NOMINEE ON THE BASIS OF THE TOTAL POPULAR VOTE WON IN THE FEBRUARY 26 CONGRESSIONAL ELECTION BY THE CONGRESSMEN ALLIED TO EACH OF THE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES. THIS "PRIMARY" WILL TAKE THE PLACE OF A NOMINATING CONVENTION, WHICH MIGHT WELL HAVE DEADLOCKED, CAUSING A SPLIT OR PRODUCING AN OPPORTUNITY FOR HOLMES OR AGUDELO TO EMERGE AS THE COMPROMISE CANDIDATE. THESE TWO WILL PROBABLY REMAIN IN THE RACE BUT SINCE EACH WILL PROBABLY DRAW POTENTIAL VOTERS AWAY FROM TURBAY AND LLERAS EQUALLY, THEIR EFFECT ON THE FINAL OUTCOME WILL BE MINIMAL.

3. THE LLERAS-TURBAY CONTEST HAS RECENTLY BECOME MORE EQUAL, A SIGNIFICANT CHANGE FROM SEVERAL WEEKS AGO WHEN MOST OBSERVERS SAW TURBAY AS THE UNQUESTIONED WINNER. INDICATIONS WERE THAT TURBAY HAD "PEAKED" AND THAT LLERAS HAD GAINED IMPETUS EVEN BEFORE THE PRESTIGIOUS LIBERAL DAILY EL TIEMPO ANNOUNCED ITS SUPPORT FOR LLERAS IN AUGUST. THESE INCLUDED UNEXPECTEDLY POOR TURNOUTS AT SOME TURBAY RALLIES, AND A CESSATION OF PUBLIC AND PRIVATE "TRIUMPHALIST" STATEMENTS BY TURBAY'S CAMPAIGNERS. ALSO, SOME POLITICIANS WHO LEAPED ABOARD THE TURBAY BANDWAGON WHEN IT SEEMED UNSTOPPABLE NOW SHOW SIGNS OF REGRETTING THEIR EARLIER DECISION. THE REASONS FOR TURBAY'S LOSS OF MOMENTUM COULD INCLUDE PUBLIC BOREDOM WITH TURBAY'S LACKLUSTER PUBLIC IMAGE AND HIS PONDEROUS ORATORICAL STYLE, IN ADDITION TO CONCERN OVER RUMORS OF CORRUPTION SURROUNDING TURBAY OR HIS LIEUTENANTS. TURBAY HAS
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SECRET

PAGE 03 BOGOTA 10350 01 OF 02 072042Z

CONSIDERED SUCH RUMORS SUFFICIENTLY WIDESPREAD TO CHALLENGER HIS DETRACTORS TO COME OUT INTO THE OPEN ON THIS ISSUE.

4. IN A CAMPAIGN WITH FEW IF ANY PROGRAM ISSUES SO FAR, POTENTIAL VOTERS ARE LEFT TO PONDER THE CANDIDATE'S IMAGES. TURBAY HAS TRIED TO STRIKE A POPULIST STANCE, AS REPRESENTING THE "EMERGING CLASSES" AGAINST THE "OLIGARCHY", THUS TRYING TO TURN TO HIS ADVANTAGE THE OPPOSITION TO HIS CANDIDACY OF MOST OF THE LIBERAL PRESS. LLERAS IS THE EXPERIENCED STATESMAN, ERUDITE IN A WIDE RANGE OF PROBLEMS OF STATE AND OF THE ECONOMY. ON THE THREE CONCERNS WHICH MOST PREOCCUPY COLOMBIANS, INFLATION, CORRUPTION AND PUBLIC ORDER, LLERAS WOULD HAVE MOST APPEAL, WITH HIS RECORD AS AN ECONOMIST AND AS A TOUGH, HONEST EXECUTIVE. NEVERTHELESS, ISSUES AND IMAGES NOTWITHSTANDING, THE POLITICAL BOSSES AND MACHINERY WHICH SUPPORT TURBAY ARE LIKELY TO BE ABLE TO DELIVER ENOUGH VOTES TO NOMINATE TURBAY. THE ELECTORAL SEPARATION FAVORS TURBAY'S NOMINATION SINCE VOTING WILL BE LIGHTER FOR THE CONGRESSIONAL ELECTIONS THAN IF A PRESIDENT WERE ALSO BEING CHOSEN. ALSO, VOTERS WILL CHOOSE THE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE BY VOTING FOR THE CONGRESSIONAL LIST IDENTIFIED WITH HIM. SINCE MOST LIBERAL CONGRESSMEN ARE TURBAYISTS, THE TENDENCY TO VOTE FOR INCUMBENTS WILL FAVOR TURBAY, AS WELL.

5. CORRUPTION DISCLOSURES COULD CHANGE THIS RADICALLY. IN ADDITION TO RUMORS OF CORRUPTION, PUBLIC CHARGES OF CHICANERY INVOLVING CONGRESSIONAL FUNDS AND STAFF JOBS HAVE RECENTLY BEEN LEVELLED AGAINST TWO OF TURBAY'S MOST PROMINENT SUPPORTERS, SENATE PRESIDENT EDMUNDO LOPEZ AND CHAMBER PRESIDENT ALBERTO SANTOFIMIO. BY THEMSELVES, THESE CHARGES ARE NOT LIKELY TO MAKE MUCH DIFFERENCE AT THE POLLS, BUT THERE IS PROBABLY ENOUGH ADDITIONAL DIRT AROUND TO CAUSE SIGNIFICANT DAMAGE TO THE TURBAY MOVEMENT IF IT IS DUG UP. FURTHERMORE, IT IS ENTIRELY POSSIBLE THAT SOMEONE CLOSE TO TURBAY WILL BE EXPOSED AS INVOLVED IN NARCOTICS TRAFFICKING, PERHAPS DAMAGING TURBAY SUFFICIENTLY TO ASSURE LLERAS THE NOMINATION.

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SECRET

PAGE 04 BOGOTA 10350 01 OF 02 072042Z

6. THE CONSERVATIVES. CONVENTIONS OF BOTH CONSERVATIVE PARTY FACTIONS CHOSE BELISARIO BETANCUR AS THEIR 1978 STANDARD BEARER. BETANCUR IS EASILY THE STRONGEST CANDIDATE, IN TERMS OF BROAD VOTER APPEAL, THAT THE PARTY COULD HAVE CHOSEN. HIS IMAGE AS A PROGRESSIVE, SOME CONSERVATIVES WOULD SAY LEFTIST, WILL ATTRACT VOTES FROM OUTSIDE THE CONSERVATIVE RANKS, NECESSARY IF THE MINORITY CONSERVATIVE PARTY IS TO HAVE A CHANCE TO WIN THE PRESIDENCY. BETANCUR'S FREEDOM OF ACTION MAY BE CIRCUMSCRIBED SINCE IT WILL BE DIFFICULT FOR HIM TO CRITICIZE THE LOPEZ ADMINISTRATION, WHICH CONTINUES TO ENJOY THE SUPPORT OF THE ALVARO GOMEZ CONSERVATIVES. BETANCUR WILL PROBABLY BE RELATIVELY NEUTRAL VIS A VIS LOPEZ, WHILE HIS OSPINA-PASIRANA SUPPORTERS CONTINUE TO LASH OUT AT THE ADMINISTRATION.

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PAGE 01 BOGOTA 10350 02 OF 02 072031Z
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S E C R E T SECTION 2 OF 2 BOGOTA 10350

LIMDIS

7. OTHER PARTIES. THE THREE CANDIDATES REPRESENTING EXTREME LEFTIST GROUPS AND WHICH INCLUDE FRAGMENTS OF ANAPO, ARE NOT LEKIELY TO AFFECT THE ELECTION OUTCOME. THE SMALL REMNANT OF ANAPO, LED BY 1974 CANDIDATE MARIA EUGENIA ROJAS IS STILL UNDECIDED ABOUT ITS CANDIDATE. STILL AN UNKNOWN QUANTITY IS THE SHADOW CANDIDACY OF RETIRED GENERAL VALENCIA TOVAR, WHO HAS BEEN URGED TO RUN AS A NATIONAL NON-PARTY CANDIDATE BY TWO SMALL, CIVIC AND PATRIOTIC ORGANIZATIONS. ALTHOUGH VALENCIA NOW HAS NEITHER THE SUPPORT NOR THE ORGANIZATION TO INFLUENCE THE ELECTION, HE DOES HAVE SOME POPULAR APPEAL AND IS WORKING TO EXPAND HIS ORGANIZATION.

8. SIGNIFICANCE FOR U.S. INTERESTS. A TURBAY PRESIDENCY WOULD RUN COUNTER TO TWO IMPORTANT U.S. INTERESTS: NARCOTICS TRAFFIC INTERDICTION AND THE MAINTENANCE OF A STABLE DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM IN COLOMBIA. TURBAY IS FRIENDLY TO THE U.S. AND IS PROBABLY PERSONNALLY HONEST. HOWEVER, SOME CLOSE SUPPORTERS AND FAMILY MEMBERS ARE BELIEVED TO BE ENGAGED IN THE NARCOTICS TRAFFIC. IN ADDITION, TURBAY WOULD BE BEHOLDEN FOR HIS ELECTION TO A LARGE NUMBER OF POLITICAL BOSSES, EACH OF WHOM CONTROLS AND WILL PROVIDE THE VOTES THAT WOULD ELECT HIM. THE CONSEQUENT DIFFUSION
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SECRET

PAGE 02 BOGOTA 10350 02 OF 02 072031Z

OF POWER AND INFLUENCE IN A TURBAY ADMINISTRATION WOULD MAKE IT DIFFICULT FOR TURBAY TO ACT AGAINST CORRUPTION IN GOVERNMENT, INCLUDING OFFICIAL PROTECTION OF DRUG TRAFFICKERS. INCREASED CORRUPTION AND A DECLINE OF AUTHORITY IN THE PRESIDENTIAL OFFICE WOULD ALSO CREATE PRESSURES FOR MILITARY INTERVENTION. TURBAY WOULD BE ACCESSIBLE TO U.S. OFFICIALS, BUT HE HAS A REPUTATION FOR BEING ACCESSIBLE TO ALMOST EVERYONE AND, EXCEPT FOR MATTERS OF IMMEDIATE INTEREST TO HIM, OF FOLLOWING THE ADVICE OF THE LAST PERSON TO SPEAK TO HIM.

9. LLERAS WOULD BE A STRONG EXECUTIVE, BEHOLDEN TO NO POLITICAL BOSSES FOR DELIVERING VOTES AND RELYING LITTLE ON THE COUNSEL OF ADVISORS OR FRIENDS. HIS DECISIVE, AUTHORITATIVE STYLE WOULD PROBABLY BE BEST ADAPTED TO UPROOT CORRUPT OFFICIALS, REDUCE OFFICIAL UNINVOLVEMENT IN DRUG TRAFFICKING AND, BY REASSURING COLOMBIANS ABOUT SECURITY, REDUCE THE RISK OF MILITARY INTERVENTION. LLERAS COULD ALSO BE A DIFFICULT AND TENACIOUS INTERLOCUTOR WITH THE U.S. OVER SUCH ISSUES AS THE NEW INTERNATIONAL

ECONOMIC ORDER, TRADE PREFERENCES FOR LATIN AMERICA, ACCESS TO U.S. MARKETS FOR COLOMBIAN PRODUCTS AND OTHER ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL ISSUES.

10. BETANCUR, SKILLED AT BEING ALL THINGS TO ALL MEN, HAS BEEN ABLE TO GAIN THE SUPPORT AND FRIENDSHIP OF PROGRESSIVE LIBERALS AND HARDCORE CONSERVATIVE THROUGHOUT HIS POLITICAL CAREER. HE PROJECTS HIMSELF AS A "PROGRESSIVE", ADVOCATING STRUCTURAL REFORMS, PARTICIPATION OF FOREIGN CAPITAL ON TERMS FAVORABLE TO NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND AN INDEPENDENT FOREIGN POLICY. THIS IS ALL WELL WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE ACCEPTED IN COLOMBIAN POLITICS IN THE LATE SEVENTIES. BETANCUR IS A PRAGMATIST, ALTHOUGH SOME IN THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY AND THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY HAVE REGARDED HIM SOMEWHAT TOO "SOCIALIST" FOR THEIR TASTES. WITH VIRTUALLY UNANIMOUS SUPPORT FOR HIS CANDIDACY FROM BOTH CONSER-
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PAGE 03 BOGOTA 10350 02 OF 02 072031Z

VATIVE PARTY FACTIONS AND VIEWED BENIGNLY BY THE LIBERALS, AMONG WHOM HE HAS MANY FRIENDS, A BETANCUR PRESIDENCY WOULD HAVE A GOOD CHANCE TO PUSH THROUGH THE MANY SOCIO-ECONOMIC REFORMS WHICH ARE NEEDED TO ASSURE COLOMBIA'S LONG TERM STABILITY, PROBABLY WITHOUT CREATING SHARP INTERNAL TENSIONS. BETANCUR WOULD BE DEALING WITH A CONGRESS CERTAIN TO BE LIBERAL-DOMINATED WHICH, DESPITE THE CONSIDERABLE POWERS OF THE PRESIDENCY COULD BLOCK HIS PROGRAMS. HOWEVER, BETANCUR SHOULD BE ABLE TO WORK WELL WITH THE LIBERAL CONGRESS. HIS GOOD LINES WITH MANY LIBERALS WOULD HELP. HIS VICTORY WOULD PROBABLY NOT CREATE SERIOUS DIFFICULTIES FOR THE U.S. AND WOULD PROBABLY ADVANCE THE U.S. INTEREST IN A STABLE, DEMOCRATIC COLOMBIA. WITH REGARD TO CORRUPTION, BETANCUR AND HIS CLOSEST ASSOCIATES ARE BELIEVED TO BE PERSONALLY HOEST BUT HIS SKILL AND FORCEFULNESS AS AN ADMINISTRATOR AND EXECUTIVE HAVE BEEN UNTESTED.
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